

# Introduction to the Particular Examen

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N.b., I am neither a spiritual director, nor an expert in the spiritual life. Rather, I seek *merely* to communicate the substantial teaching of the Ignatian Spiritual Masters on the practice of the Particular Examen.

*Why should one begin to practice the particular examen in conjunction with their meditation/mental prayer?*

The particular examen is to mediation what execution is to intention. The resolution which is the apex of one's meditation is carried out via the particular examen. Without the particular examen, the meditation becomes fruitless and without the meditation, the particular examen is without foundation. This will be seen in more detail below.

*Where did our most Holy Father St. Ignatius formulate the particular examen?*

A. In His Exercises, St. Ignatius states that the particular examen "contains in it three [exercises], and two to examine oneself. The first time is in the morning, immediately on rising, when one ought to propose to guard himself with diligence against that particular sin or defect which he wants to correct and amend. The second time is after dinner, when one is to ask of God our Lord what one wants, namely, grace to remember how many times he has fallen into that particular sin or defect, and to amend himself in the future. "Then let him make the first examen, asking account of his soul of that particular thing proposed, which he wants to correct and amend. "Let him go over hour by hour, or period by period, commencing at the hour he rose, and continuing up to the hour and instant of the present examen, and let him make in the first line of the G=== as many dots as were the times he has fallen into that particular sin or defect. Then let him resolve anew to amend himself up to the second examen which he will make. The third time: after supper, the second examen will be made, in the same way, hour by hour, commencing at the first examen and continuing up to the present (second) one, and let him make in the second line of the same G=== as many dots as were the times he has fallen into that particular sin or defect." (24-26)

*Was he unique in this formulation?*

A. In one sense, he was unique in bringing it to this precise and most efficacious formulation. In another sense, St. Ignatius merely replicated the advice that was given by many of the desert fathers and even pagan philosophers.

*Which of the sons of St. Ignatius formulated the particular examen?*

A. Fr. Luis de la Palma, [A Treatise on the Particular Examen of Conscience according to the Method of St. Ignatius](#) and Fr. Alphonso Rodríguez, *The Practice Of Christian And Religious Perfection*, [Treatise Seven](#)

*Above, we gave a short description of the particular examen, what is a full definition that shows its various parts?*

A. Per Fr. Luis de la Palma, one may say that "The Particular Examen is a spiritual contest against some particular fault, and comprises a purpose not to fall, an anxious desire to keep this purpose, an examination whether we have fallen, and a comparison between different intervals, that we may discover whether any correction has been obtained, and to what extent, and that in this manner the fault which most hinders us may be thoroughly uprooted, and the virtue we stand in need of be implanted in our hearts."

*Why is this description sufficient?*

A. This description offers the form, matter, and final cause of the Particular examen.

*What is the form of the particular examen?*

A. Formally speaking, it is *the resolution as flowing from meditation*, but, we may split this into four acts,

1. **Determination** to keep the resolution ("a purpose not to fall"),
2. **Watchfulness** over the resolution ("an anxious desire to keep this purpose"),
3. **Examination** whether we have kept this resolution ("an examination whether we have fallen"),
4. **Comparison** between the time periods in which we have sought to keep this resolution ("a comparison between different intervals")

*What is the matter of the particular examen?*

A. The matter of the particular examen is in some particular fault we must correct or virtue we must acquire ("against some particular fault").

*What is the end of the particular examen?*

A. The end of the particular examen is to eliminate that particular fault or acquire that virtue that is the matter of the examen by an application of the form.

*How does one carry out the first part of the form?*

A. The first part of the form, i.e., the **determination**, is carried out by the first examen described by St. Ignatius above, i.e., "immediately on rising, when one ought to propose to guard himself with diligence against that particular sin or defect which he wants to correct and amend."

*Is this determination carried out easily?*

A. No. It is important to notice that this "purposing" is not a simple wish, but, rather, a strong act of the will wherein we bind ourselves solemnly to carry out the task of destroying such and such a vice or building such and such a virtue. As we know from philosophy, "the order of efficient causes must be proportioned to the order of ends," thus, since this is such a difficult end, i.e., destroying vice, we need to bring about strong means. In a similar way, one would not seek to walk (weak means) if he wished to travel across the country (large end).

The determination is called by some authors a "declaration of war" against the vice we seek to destroy. Such cannot be carried out in a passing matter.

*How, then, ought we to carry out our determination?*

A. As stated above, particular examen flows forth from the meditation. More particularly, the determination forms the binding link between mental prayer and the general examen. Thus, one's meditation arms one for battle by one's considerations, affections, and resolutions, finally declaring war on one's vice by one's determination.

*What are the essential parts to making a determination?*

*What are the qualities of a good determination?*

A. First, it must be **definite** rather than general (e.g., it is better to resolve to not over indulge in food quantitatively than to simply resolve not to be gluttonous).

Second, it must be **discreet** rather than overly ambitious (e.g., it is better to resolve to avoid certain deliberate venial sins than removing all inordinate movements if one is not proportioned to the latter in their degree of perfection).

Third, it must be **steadfast**.

Fourth, it must be **humble**. Here, we seek to follow Fr. Scupoli's "two weapons" of distrust of self and complete trust in God. Thus, we will not imagine the particular examen to function in a Pelagian sense, but will always rely on constant prayer.

Fifth, it must **daily increase**, i.e., the resolution made tends towards the perfection of the virtue/perfect removal of the vice rather than remaining stagnant.

*How does one properly carry out their determination?*

A. The proper carrying out of the determination is done by the next three parts of the form of the particular examen. Most especially the second part, i.e., **watchfulness**. In watchfulness, one constantly keeps watch over his actions in order to bring them into conformity with his resolution.

*What is a motivation?*

A. *Motivations* are those considerations that move the will to carry out a certain task, e.g., if one does not wish to go to work, he can motive himself by considering the needs of his family.

*What role do motivations play in watchfulness?*

A. In order to keep one's determination strong from one's morning examen, one ought to recall various motives for following through, especially those drawn from one's meditation, e.g., if someone has a devotion to St. Thomas Aquinas and struggles with purity, they may recall St. Thomas Aquinas' victory over the "woman of the night" in order to strengthen one's resolve.

*What are the two kinds of motivation?*

A. There are general motivations to virtue (i.e., those that motivate to virtue in general and can be used anytime) and special motivations to a particular virtue (i.e., those that motivate to the keeping of a certain virtue). Both can be found in abundance in Ven. Louis of Granada's *Sinner's Guide*.

*What ought one to do when one falls into that vice?*

A. In order to prepare for the third and fourth parts of the form of the particular examen, one ought to, 1. Discreetly strike one's breast and offer up a small ejaculation, and 2. Record the transgression (i.e., make a simple mark in a book, no need to record details). This will aid in one's memory in the next parts.

*What is the third part of the form of the particular examen?*

A. The third part is the *examination* properly so called. Here, one looks back to one's failure to keep the resolution one set out to accomplish. St. Ignatius intends to signify this when he states that "The second [examination] is after [lunch], when one is to ask of God our Lord...[for the] grace to remember how many times he has fallen into that particular sin or defect, and to amend himself in the future...asking account of his soul of that particular thing proposed, which he wants to correct and amend. Let him go over hour by hour, or period by period, commencing at the hour he rose, and continuing up to the hour and instant of the present examen...Then let him resolve anew to amend himself up to the [third examination] which he will make. The third time: after [dinner], the [third examination] will be made, in the same way, hour by hour, commencing at the [second examination] and continuing up to the present one."

*At what time does one carry out this examination?*

A. Unlike the first examen, wherein one determines the resolution, there is some flexibility with the examination properly so called. Here, one simply ought to choose an appropriate time/times for the examination that is able to cover an appropriately long period of time. Thus, if one chooses to only make one of these examinations, then it must be before bed, so that one is able to consider one's sin throughout the entire day. Or, if one seeks twice (or more), then one can choose once before bed and then the other time[s] at any other appropriate instance.

*Is there any advantage to having two examinations?*

A. Yes, very much so. This is for two reasons.

1. One is able to better recall their instances of transgression when it is done more frequently.
2. One is able to better motivate the will when it is done with more frequency so that one does not "bite off more than they can chew," e.g., if one is addicted to Pornography, to resolute to "make it" without indulging in the desire or the act until lunch time and then from lunch time to bed time is a much easier set of goals than resolving to go the entire day.